

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Elko Field Office
Elko, Nevada**

**BASCO FIRE
EMERGENCY STABILIZATION AND REHABILITATION PLAN
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND DECISION RECORD
BLM/EK/PL-2006/025**

The Basco Fire (C1MC) started on July 26, 2006 and was caused by lightning. The fire burned a total of 47,185 acres in the Tuscarora Mountains in northwestern Elko County, Nevada, by the time it was contained on August 2, 2006. Elevations in the burned area ranged from 5,661 feet (1,726 meters) to 8,184 Feet (2,495 meters). Approximately 27,014 acres are public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and 20,171 acres are private land. A National Interagency Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team assessed the damage to BLM lands and prepared the Basco Fire Emergency Stabilization (ES) Plan. To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the BAER team also prepared the combined Basco Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (EA). The damage assessment, plans, EA, and associated documents are available for inspection upon request to the BLM, Elko Field Office.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the August 2006 Basco Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan EA, I have determined that the proposed action will not have a significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required prior to approving and implementing the proposed plan.

Decision

It is my decision to implement the Basco Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan, as described in the EA and summarized below.

Drill Seeding

Drill seed approximately 1,147 acres to prevent site degradation, maintain ecological stability, and prevent the spread of nonnative invasive weeds. Seeding will be completed using a rangeland drill ahead of, or concurrent with, fall or winter moisture.

Dozer Line Seeding

The dozer lines will be seeded utilizing a broadcast and drag method. Broadcast seeding methods will be done utilizing either an ATV, pickup, or by hand. The dozer line will be dragged using a harrow or equivalent piece of equipment to provide full soil contact of the seeded species, in order to increase the success of treatment. The dozer lines will be seeded with a mixture, such as bluebunch wheatgrass, western yarrow, and blue flax.

Aerial Seeding

Aerially seed approximately 1,543 acres to prevent site degradation, maintain ecological stability, and prevent the spread of nonnative invasive weeds. Seed will be applied by rotor aircraft ahead of or concurrent with fall or winter moisture. Aerial seeding will be completed on sites that cannot be seeded by ground seeding methods.

Aerial Wildlife Habitat Broadcast Seeding

Aerially seed approximately 6,750 acres with Wyoming and basin big sagebrush, gray low sagebrush, Western yarrow and native grasses. Treatments will be completed aerially such as with use of a helicopter with seed broadcast bucket. Seeding in swaths (e.g. seed application on 80 foot swath, leave 160 foot swath and apply again) that allow for plant establishment and future seed sources will be prioritized on any “large” areas that burned completely. Selective spot seeding will also be considered due to the mosaic of vegetation types affected and to avoid intact unburned areas to where specific sagebrush species will be seeded considering site potential.

Antelope Bitterbrush Seeding/Seedling Planting

In the event that bitterbrush recruitment from seed or young to mature age class plant re-sprouting is not observed through monitoring by spring 2008, all or portions of at least 500 acres will be considered for seeding or seedling plantings.

Quaking Aspen Protection and Management

Approximately two miles of free-standing steel rail fence, or three-strand barbed wire fence with bottom wire smooth, will be used to protect approximately 50 acres of fire-affected quaking aspen stands, as deemed necessary and feasible.

Noxious Weed Detection and Treatment

Noxious weed treatment will provide for control of known nonnative weed infestations within the Basco Fire perimeter prior to seed-set and maturation. Control of these Nevada listed noxious weeds needs to be conducted or they will spread into non-infested areas of the burn. Integrated pest management techniques (herbicides, biological, mechanical, and cultural control methods) will be used as appropriate to prevent the spread and establishment of noxious weeds within the fire area. No cost was developed for possible hand grubbing of weeds since so few weeds will be treated in this manner, and grubbing will occur in association with spraying.

Conduct noxious weed detection surveys for possible invasion of noxious weeds on roads, hand lines, dozer lines, and other disturbed areas within the Basco Fire perimeter. Monitor existing noxious weed infestations within the burned area to determine if expansion is occurring into non-infested areas. An inventory will be conducted for noxious weeds near existing locations and in areas that have a high probability for invasion within the burned area.

Protective Fences

Reconstruct protective fences on approximately 14 miles burned by the Basco Fire. Burned fence materials, including wire, will be removed. Fences will be used to protect seeded areas or areas managed for natural recovery from livestock grazing. Construct approximately 6 miles of new fence and remove approximately 1 mile of extraneous fence damaged by fire for purpose of

providing additional protection for drill seedings and for Lahontan Cutthroat Trout recovery habitat on Susie Creek.

Cultural Resources Post Fire Assessment, Inventory and Protection

Cultural resource protection will entail assessment of known National Register or potentially eligible prehistoric and historic archaeological sites for post-fire damage and potential risk from erosion, looting or vandalism. This treatment also provides for actions to protect easily accessible sites that are deemed to be highly sensitive to looting. Cultural resource inventories will be conducted on areas proposed for ground disturbing stabilization treatment (fence construction, drill seeding, etc). These inventories will be conducted prior to implementation of the treatments in order to identify and avoid cultural resources determined by the BLM to be eligible for the National Register. Inventories will be in accordance with the State Protocol Agreement between the Nevada BLM and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). All cultural resources located or relocated will be recorded on the Nevada IMACS short form and plotted on maps. Cultural resources that are determined to be eligible for the National Register will be flagged for avoidance prior to stabilization activities. Flagging will be removed as soon as possible after stabilization treatments to minimize the potential for looting and vandalism.

Grazing Closure

Livestock grazing will be removed from the burned area in order to allow the burned and seeded vegetation to successfully establish. Post-fire grazing management, including the period of time needed for closure, will be determined based on coordination, cooperation, and consultation with the interested public, monitoring, and achievement of site specific resource objectives. The closure will occur for a minimum of two growing seasons or until establishment objectives are met, in order to provide an adequate amount of time to allow the seeded vegetation to establish and plant species not damaged by the wildfire to respond to natural revegetation. The burned area will be reopened to livestock grazing once the establishment objectives in any fire closure agreements or decisions have been met.

Monitoring

Areas within the Basco Fire burned from low soil burn severity to high, with considerable unburned islands creating a mosaic effect throughout the burned area. The BAER Team vegetation and watershed groups, in consultation with the range and natural resource staff of the Elko Field Office, have recommended vegetation treatments to stabilize soils, prevent the invasion of nonnative annual plant species, and treat known locations of noxious weeds. This specification proposes reseeding monitoring for three years following treatment (2007–2009) to ascertain success of revegetation efforts. Utilize “Freqdens” techniques or similar methods established for seeded areas. Use production/site composition methods and/or density for areas managed for natural release. Consult with APHIS representatives on potential impacts to seedings from Mormon cricket epidemics. Monitor relic aspen stands and stream and riparian habitats for post fire regeneration and impacts from grazing and wildlife.

Rationale

Implementation of the proposed action described in the Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan EA for the Basco Fire will protect soils in the burned area, including

preventing potential loss of soil due to wind and water erosion; will reduce potential invasion and establishment of noxious weeds and cheatgrass; will provide quality forage for livestock and wildlife; and will facilitate meeting established standards and guidelines for livestock grazing.

Exclusion of livestock grazing is necessary to allow seedling establishment, restore plant vigor and seed production, and to allow reestablishment of preferred species and to deter invasion of undesirable species. The proposed fence will be constructed around the burn perimeter to keep grazing animals off the recovering burn to allow establishment of seeded and pre-fire vegetation species. This temporary fencing will be used in conjunction with existing fences to protect the burn area from grazing. This fencing and subsequent rest from grazing will allow for plants to re-establish and develop effective root depths and root reserves. Vegetation establishment will help reduce the risk of dust and ash storms decreasing visibility on Highway 225. Vegetation establishment will help reduce the risk of accelerated soil erosion and mud flows into Lone Mountain Creek, Susie Creek and its tributaries and provide for soil stabilization. Vegetation associated with wetlands, riparian zones, and floodplains will be allowed to reestablish.

The broadcast seedings within drainages and low lying areas and aerial seeding on slopes will provide for soil stabilization and will reduce the potential invasion of cheatgrass, Canada thistle, musk thistle, hoary cress, Russian knapweed, and other invasive weeds. The seedings will also provide cover and forage for area wildlife populations and nesting habitat for migratory birds. Successful seeding of some drainages and the low lying areas near Lone Mountain Creek, Susie Creek and its tributaries will help reduce runoff and trap sediment, which will help prevent further degradation to the water quality. Several of the streams affected by the Basco Fire support limited and isolated populations of fish species, including the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout which is a federally listed threatened species. Successful seeding of the drainages and low lying areas will also help protect these aquatic species habitat from receiving excessive amounts of sediment and provide for streambank stabilization.

Control of noxious weeds is consistent with the management plans for the resource and will help protect the ecological integrity, biodiversity, and site productivity of this shrub-steppe plant community. Treatment of noxious weeds is necessary to comply with Nevada State Laws, to implement the Integrated Weed Management Program of the Elko Field Office, and to be responsible neighbors to the adjacent private landowners. Working cooperatively with local weed management groups and private landowners will achieve better weed management.

The proposed action conforms to the 1987 Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP), as it was amended for fire management on September 29, 2004. The decision for fire rehabilitation from the Approved Fire Management Amendment, page 20, is to “Conduct fire rehabilitation activities to emulate historic or pre-fire ecosystem structure, functioning, diversity and/or to restore a healthy stable ecosystem.” The proposed action is consistent with resource objectives of the plan and with other Federal, state, local and tribal laws, regulations, policies and plans to the maximum extent possible.

Approval and Implementation Date

This wildfire management decision is issued under 43 CFR 4190.1 and is effective immediately. The BLM has made the determination that vegetation, soil, or other resources on the public lands

are at risk of wildfire due to drought, fuels buildup, or other reasons, or at immediate risk of erosion or other damage due to wildfire. Thus, notwithstanding the provisions of 43 CFR 4.21(a)(1), filing a notice of appeal under 43 CFR Part 4 does not automatically suspend the effect of the decision. The Interior Board of Land Appeals must decide an appeal of this decision within 60 days after all pleadings have been filed, and within 180 days after the appeal was filed. (43 CFR 4.416)

Administrative Review or Appeal Procedures

Within 30 days of receipt of this decision, parties who are adversely affected and believe it is incorrect have the right to appeal to the Department of the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 4.4. Procedural information on "Taking Appeals to the Board of Land Appeals" can be obtained at the BLM, Elko Field Office. An appeal should be in writing and specify the reasons, clearly and concisely, as to why the decision is in error. A copy of the Statement of Reasons must also be supplied to this office. Also within 30 days of receipt of this decision, appellants have a right to file a petition for a stay (suspension) of the decision together with an appeal, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.21. The appellant has the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

_____/s/_____
HELEN HANKINS
Field Manager

August 28, 2006
Date